

**National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Cumberland Gap National Historical Park
Kentucky**



General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

Record of Decision

Approved: r

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Date:

9-13-10

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

RECORD OF DECISION

**GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park

Kentucky

The Department of the Interior (DOI), National Park Service (NPS), has prepared this Record of Decision (ROD) on the General Management Plan (GMP) / Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Cumberland Gap National Historical Park (CUGA). This ROD includes a description of the background of the project, a statement of the decision made, a synopsis of other alternatives considered, the basis for the decision, findings on impairment of park resources and values, a description of the environmentally preferable alternative, a listing of measures to minimize environmental harm, and an overview of public and agency involvement in the decision-making process.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of the GMP is to provide a comprehensive direction for resource preservation and visitor use and a basic foundation for decision making for the park for the next 15 to 20 years. The plan prescribes the resource conditions and visitor experiences that are to be achieved and maintained in the park over time. The clarification of what must be achieved according to law and policy is based on a review of the park's purpose, significance, and special mandates.

DECISION (SELECTED ACTION)

Description of the Selected Action

The Preferred Alternative (selected action, Alternative C) will provide a greater amount of visitor access to the park as compared to current management practices, while minimizing the potential for adverse effects on resources. This will be achieved through construction of a limited number of new unobtrusive, sustainably designed facilities sited within the context of their cultural and natural settings. Alternative C will also feature increased levels of education, outreach, and formalized partnering.

Eleven new minor facilities are proposed for construction in Developed Zones near Fern Lake, the Gap, and the areas adjacent to the Hensley Settlement under Alternative C. These facilities will provide increased visitor access to the park. Under Alternative C, the Developed Zone at Fern Lake and the Hensley Settlement will be larger than Alternative A, providing the opportunity for additional limited facilities in the future. Creation of a Developed Zone on the west side of the Hensley Settlement will allow for improvement of Shillalah Creek Road access by creation of a new parking area at the base of Brush Mountain and a paved or expanded parking area adjacent to the Hensley Settlement. Creation of a Developed Zone on the east side of the Hensley Settlement (adjacent to the existing Hensley Settlement Historic District) will provide visitors with increased potential to access more facilities such as campsites, trails, and Martin's Fork Cabin as compared to Alternative A. Expansion of the Developed Zone to include Kentucky State Highway 988 from

Sugar Run to the Gap area will allow greater visitor access to this part of the park as compared to current management practices. Inclusion of Pinnacle Road in the Developed Zone will have a similar effect. In addition, visitors will be provided with increased access to the Shillalah Creek Wildlife Management area and the Kentucky Division of Water lands located adjacent to the park.

Camping opportunities will change by providing electrical hookups in Loop D at the Wilderness Road campground, and by providing access for horse trailers at 2 to 4 selected campsites. Under Alternative C, increased connectivity from the visitor center to Fern Lake will be provided through a Developed Zone along the eastern end of the lake that will connect to the Developed Zone around the visitor center at the Gap. Additional park facilities, such as hiking trails, composting comfort station, or maintenance road, could be constructed within this larger Developed Zone. A Natural Zone will also be established to incorporate the rest of the Fern Lake watershed.

Opportunities for participating in interpretive and education programs (e.g., guided hikes, seasonal and school programs), and some special events will increase as compared to Alternative A. Measures will also be taken to formalize partnering efforts, and establish programs that support the park. Opportunities to enjoy recreational activities will increase, with increased opportunities for access in a variety of settings. These changes will also increase opportunities for establishing future concession and commercial services.

Addition of new facilities and activities will require additional staff to manage cultural and natural resources in order to maintain resource conditions and character while providing a quality visitor experience. A total of 7.2 full time equivalent staff will be hired under Alternative C to address these needs.

Mitigation Measures / Monitoring

A variety of measures to avoid, reduce or minimize potentially adverse impacts of the Preferred Action on natural and cultural resources will be implemented as part of the GMP. These will include the following:

- Additional background research, resource inventory, and National Register evaluations will be conducted where information about the location and significance of cultural or natural resources is lacking. This information will be used to help avoid or minimize potentially adverse impacts in the early planning phase of each project by siting new facilities in previously disturbed or existing developed areas using designs that avoid known or suspected resources of concern. Results of site specific studies will be incorporated into planning and compliance documents as required. Where applicable, impacts of proposed facilities will be addressed by completion of an environmental assessment that will include site-specific mitigation measures for each project.
- Surveys will be conducted prior to construction to determine whether protected species are present on a particular site. Facilities will be sited and designed to avoid adverse effects whenever possible. If avoidance is not feasible, adverse effects will be minimized and compensated for, as appropriate, and in consultation with appropriate resource agencies.
- Adverse impacts to cultural resources will be avoided by identifying historic properties prior to an undertaking by following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Archeology and Historic Preservation and by using visual screens and/ or sensitive designs that are compatible with historic resources. Studies carried out in advance of undertakings to identify historic properties and assess effects will comply with the requirements of Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), 36 CFR 60, 36 CFR 800, and *NPS Director's Order-28 and 28A: Archeology*. Mitigation measures, developed in consultation with the appropriate Kentucky/ Tennessee/ Virginia State Historic Preservation

Officer, may include data recovery of identified National Register (NR) eligible archeological sites and documentation of built resources in accordance with Historic American Buildings Survey/ Historic American Engineering Record standards. If, during construction, any previously unknown archeological resources are discovered, all work in the immediate vicinity of the discovery will be halted until the resources could be identified and documented, and an appropriate mitigation strategy developed in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800.13.

- Construction zones will be identified and fenced with temporary fencing or a similar material prior to initiating new construction. The fencing will define the construction zone and confine activity to the minimum area required. All protection measures will be clearly stated in construction specifications, and workers will be instructed to avoid areas beyond the fencing. Measures to control dust and erosion during construction will be identified and could include the following: watering dry soils; using silt fences and sedimentation controls; stabilizing soils during and after construction with specially designed fabrics, certified straw or other materials; covering haul trucks. Following completion of construction activities, all areas of disturbed soils and vegetation will be re-graded and re-vegetated as soon as possible. Natural topographic features will be restored to the extent possible using excavated soils from other park projects, and native species will be used in all re-vegetation efforts. Restoration efforts will be maximized by using salvaged topsoil and native vegetation and by monitoring re-vegetation success for several growing seasons as appropriate. Undesirable species will be monitored and control strategies initiated if needed.
- Standard noise abatement measures will be implemented during construction of new facilities. These measures could include scheduling construction activities to minimize impacts, use of the best available noise control techniques, use of hydraulically or electrically powered tools, keeping construction activities at the proper distance from sensitive uses or resources, and requiring that construction equipment not be left idling for any longer than necessary.
- Boardwalks, fences, signs, and similar measures will be used to avoid and minimize potentially adverse effects by routing people away from sensitive resources such as wetlands, riparian habitats, or historic resources, while still allowing access to important points of interest.
- Mitigation will also be achieved by completion of future planning efforts that address cultural resources and natural resources. These efforts will include completion of other more detailed studies, plans, and updates such as a Cultural Landscape Inventory, Cultural Landscape Reports, Historic Structure Reports, Historic Structures Preservation Guides for Hensley Settlement, cultural resource surveys, Baseline Inventory of Cultural Resources in Gap Cave, Collections Management Plan (CMP), and A Farm Management Plan for the Hensley Settlement. Other resource management plans include a Cave Management Plan for Gap Cavern, additional Geographic Information System database development, natural resource surveys, Long Range Interpretive Plan, Land Protection Plan, Park Asset Management Plan and a Fire Management Plan. Cultural and natural resources will also be addressed in a separate resource stewardship strategy.
- The type and level of visitor use that can be accommodated while sustaining the desired resource conditions and visitor experience are addressed through a set of indicators and standards that provide limits of acceptable change for the park. The DOI will monitor the indicators and take management action to assure that standards are met to address visitor

experience, the level of interpretation, impacts from backcountry camping, impacts to sensitive plants at White Rocks, protection of water quality, and unauthorized trails.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative A, No Action

Alternative A consists of a continuation of current management practices, directions, and trends at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. The types of park visitor activities and uses would remain the same as they are currently, except new activities at Fern Lake would include fishing, boating (no gasoline engines, electric trolling motors are appropriate), with nearby picnicking, hiking, and horseback riding. Four (full-time equivalent) NPS staff members would be added to the park primarily to assist in the management of the Fern Lake watershed and the Hensley Settlement.

The park has a wide variety of interpretive or outreach/education programs that have been a key element in its success over the years. These programs include Heritage Fairs, Nature Fairs, and a large number of educational programs. In addition, partnering programs with local and regional organizations have been developed. Under Alternative A, the numbers and types of these programs would continue at their present levels as funding allows.

Under Alternative A, there would be no major changes in the condition or character of natural and cultural resources in the majority of the park. Efforts to preserve as many historic structures and landscapes as possible, with emphasis of the Historic Districts, would continue. Natural resource management programs would continue to emphasize protection of natural resources and processes. The park would also be responsible for maintaining the character and condition of the Fern Lake watershed as well as Recommended Wilderness. No new programs, activities, trails, or visitor uses would be expected.

Under the No Action Alternative, the existing management zones, as specified in the 1979 Master Plan, would continue to be implemented. There are currently three zones at the park with a variety of sub-zones. The management zones under the No Action Alternative include the Development, Natural, and Historical Zones.

Alternative B

Under Alternative B, opportunities for visitor access would be increased as compared with Alternative A by providing additional, limited park facilities. This would expand visitor use of the park, while avoiding and minimizing potential adverse effects on natural and cultural resources. This would be achieved by strategically locating and limiting the numbers and types of new facilities, primarily within the newly established Developed Zones at Fern Lake, areas adjacent to the Hensley Settlement, the Visitor Center area, and the Wilderness Campground. Acquisition and management of Fern Lake under Alternative B would be the same as Alternative A, except under Alternative B a new Developed Zone would be established at Fern Lake that would make it possible to construct and operate new facilities to provide increased visitor access to this area.

By creation of several new and limited Developed Zones, connectivity between different areas of the park would also be increased under Alternative B as compared to Alternative A. Under Alternative B, seven new minor facilities have been identified for Developed Zones at Fern Lake, the Gap area, and areas adjacent to the Hensley Settlement that allow for additional facilities and provide visitors increased access to the park. Visitors would also experience increased connectivity between the campground and the Gap and the Town of Cumberland Gap via enhanced biking and hiking trails. Expansion of the Developed Zone to include Kentucky State Highway 988 from Sugar Run to the Gap area would allow greater visitor access to this part of the park. Inclusion of Pinnacle Road in the Developed Zone would have a similar effect. Creation of a Developed Zone in areas near the Hensley Settlement would increase the potential use of this important resource for a wider

variety of visitor and concessioner activities such as wagon rides and guided tours as compared to Alternative A. These management actions would provide increased opportunities for concession and commercial services.

Creation of a Developed Zone on the west side of the Hensley Settlement would allow for improvement of Shillalah Creek Road (to remain gated) and creation of a new parking area at the base of Brush Mountain, providing visitors with an improved ability to park, and then hike, bike, or ride horses to the Hensley Settlement. Creation of a Developed Zone on the east side of the Hensley Settlement would provide visitors with an increased potential to access more facilities such as campsites, trails, and Martin's Fork Cabin as compared to Alternative A. In addition, visitors would be provided with increased access to the Shillalah Creek Wildlife Management area and the Kentucky Division of Water lands located adjacent to the park. Visitors would continue to use and experience the Civic Park Area near Sand Cave and White Rocks within the new Developed Zone.

Additional resource management (four additional staff, full-time equivalent) would be required to maintain the condition and character of natural and cultural resources and to manage and operate new facilities in the park. Resource management efforts needed to maintain resource conditions and character in all other areas of the park would otherwise be similar to Alternative A. Under Alternative B, the level of public outreach, education and partnering would be the same as Alternative A. No additional staffing would be proposed to support these activities.

BASIS FOR DECISION

The proposed action, Alternative C, was selected using the choosing by advantages decision making system, where decisions are based on the importance of advantages between alternatives. The evaluation involves the identification of the attributes or characteristics of each alternative relative to the evaluation criteria, a determination of the advantages for each alternative within each evaluation factor, and then the weighing of importance of each advantage.

Alternative C best balances the park's need to provide high-quality visitor experiences and protect park resources. The factors used in the decision making are: 1) Protect cultural and natural resources; 2) Provide for visitor enjoyment; 3) Improve efficiency of park operations; and 4) Provide cost-effective environmentally responsible and otherwise beneficial development for the DOI. A summary of the results of the analysis for each factor is provided in the paragraphs that follow.

Protect Cultural and Natural Resources

Cultural resources, including Hensley Settlement, Civil War sites, rock shelters, the iron furnace, Wilderness Road and historic structures at Fern Lake, were discussed. Alternative C was scored as providing the most opportunity for preventing loss of cultural resources. Alternative C also received the highest relative score regarding the ability to maintain and improve the condition of cultural resources.

Natural resources, including caves, Fern Lake and watershed, bogs and wetlands, wildlife, threatened and endangered species, acres within the natural zone, and geologic features were addressed with regard to preventing loss of natural resources. Alternative A scored the highest for this factor because there would be some limited new facilities proposed under other action alternatives. Alternative C received the highest score regarding the ability to maintain and improve natural resource conditions based upon new management zones, increased opportunities for stewardship and partnering, and provision for additional staff.

Wilderness values were also assessed in terms of quiet and solitude, scenic views and vistas, natural processes, research opportunities, and wildlife habitat. Alternative A scored highest regarding the preservation of wilderness values.

Provide for Visitor Enjoyment

Alternative C scored highest with regard to providing visitor services, educational and recreational opportunities as well as opportunities for partnering compared to other alternatives. There was a slight advantage for Alternative A compared to other alternatives regarding the degree of challenge to provide for public health, safety and welfare in the frontcountry and backcountry.

Improve Efficiency of Park Operations

The planning team scored the ability of each of the alternatives to improve operational efficiency and sustainability in terms of: staff training, technology improvements, partnering with other agencies/sharing of resources, and the facility management software system. Alternative C scored higher, as showing significant improvement compared to Alternatives B and C. This is mainly attributable to increase in staffing and focus on partnering and opportunities to use sustainable practices under Alternative C. Alternative A scored the highest for providing for employee health, safety and welfare in terms of law enforcement, maintenance, training, and the fire module. The rationale for this scoring was mainly associated with comparatively fewer opportunities for new development and limiting access and activities to existing levels.

Provide Cost-Effective, Environmentally Responsible, and Otherwise Beneficial Development for the NPS

The planning team assessed this factor in terms of connectivity to other state and local managed lands. The planning team evaluated the types of activities, access, and visitor opportunities for each of the alternatives. Alternative C scored the highest because it provides the greatest degree of connectivity with local and state agencies and public lands. Alternative C features increased levels of education, outreach, and formalized partnering.

Cost

Preliminary cost estimates were developed for each alternative based upon relative differences between staffing increases and estimated annual and one-time costs. The cost estimates were compared to the importance value assigned to each alternative, resulting in the cost to benefit analysis.

The greatest magnitude of advantages among the alternatives is provided by Alternative C, and the highest benefit to cost ratio is provided by Alternative C. The second highest benefit to cost ratio is provided by Alternative B. Alternative A provides the lowest benefit to cost ratio as well as the lowest magnitude of advantage.

FINDINGS ON IMPAIRMENT OF PARK RESOURCES AND VALUES

Under the preferred alternative, Alternative C, the majority of impacts on natural resources and cultural resources would result from increasing access and visitor use over the life of the plan. The park would continue management efforts to maintain 14,091 acres as wilderness, as directed by Congress. Under all alternatives, this natural area provides outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive wilderness experiences.

Impacts associated with implementing Alternative C are primarily related to increasing visitor access and activity in the Developed Zones associated with the Hensley Settlement, the Gap and Fern Lake. The park would be protected by continuation of effective management of natural and cultural resources, while at the same time increasing services and access, primarily in the Developed Zones. Increasing visitor access and range of visitor experiences in this manner would have long-term, moderate to major and beneficial effects on visitor use and experience, while minimizing potentially adverse effects of any new facilities on natural and cultural resources. Visitors who

voiced satisfaction with current conditions may perceive a long-term moderate, adverse affect related to visitor use and experience.

Effects on natural and cultural resources would be primarily related to construction and operation of a limited number of new facilities. To the extent practicable, the NPS would implement sustainable practices and design facilities to blend with their natural and cultural environments/context. In addition, environmental assessments would be completed to assure potentially adverse effects are avoided or greatly minimized through proper siting and design. This would mitigate potentially adverse impacts. Adverse impacts on natural resources would therefore be primarily long- and short-term, negligible to minor.

Construction and operation of new facilities would cause long-term, minor adverse effects to archeological resources. In general, the effects of increased education, outreach, and partnering efforts on most natural and cultural resources would be long-term, moderate to major and beneficial. Increased access and visitor services would provide many of the same results, both beneficial and adverse. Impacts to cultural resources, based on Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, would be considered to be potentially adverse, since specific project designs are not yet available. Compliance with both the National Environmental Policy Act and Section 106 will be required for future projects. Any required documentation will be tiered to the GMP/EIS in the future.

Alternative C would have long-term moderate, beneficial effects to park operations, transportation, concessions and commercial services. Impacts of Alternative C on socioeconomics would be similar to Alternative B, long- and short-term, negligible to moderate and beneficial. Long- and short-term, minor adverse impacts would occur as a result of implementation of Alternative C on soundscape and scenic resources and visual quality.

As described in the "Mitigation" section, all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative will be adopted. Because there would be no major adverse impacts to resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes in the establishing legislation or proclamation for CUGA; (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or (3) identified as a goal in relevant DOI planning documents, there would be no impairment of the park's resources or values. After a review of these effects, the alternative selected for implementation will not impair park resources or values and will not violate the NPS Organic Act.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

In accordance with Director's Order 12, the NPS is required to identify the "environmentally preferred alternative" in all environmental documents, including environmental impact statements. The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in the National Environmental Policy Act, which is guided by the President's Council on Environmental Quality. The Council on Environmental Quality provides direction that the environmentally preferred alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in Section 101 of the National Environmental Policy Act. Each of the management alternatives would effectively manage the park and protect resources, each having environmental advantages over the others.

Alternative C, was identified as the environmentally preferred alternative, based on its ability to best meet the six national environmental criteria as described in the paragraphs that follow.

1. *Fulfilling the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.* Alternative A would best protect the environment by limiting the level and intensity of use of the built environment. As the Developed Zone would be

expanded under both action alternatives, Alternative A would best satisfy the criteria to "Fulfill the responsibilities as trustee of the environment." All other alternatives would fulfill this criterion to a lesser degree through protection of known natural and cultural resources located in the park. Alternative C would expand partnering, as well as education and outreach, which would broadcast information about the park to an expanded population. This would effectively increase park stewardship and build long term relationships that would benefit the park resources and protection.

2. *Assuring for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings.* Each of the alternatives would equally meet criterion 2 by providing visitors with safe, healthful, productive, esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings. There would be very few discernable differences across alternatives.
3. *Attaining the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.* Alternative C would provide the widest "range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences..." since this alternative provides for the greatest increase in opportunities for visitor access, visitor use and enjoyment, and diversity of experience without degrading resources. The increase in park staff, increased opportunities for interpretive, educational and partnering provided under Alternative C also expands stewardship of the park and increases the potential for volunteerism and means to reach a more diverse, larger audience regarding the benefits of protecting park resources. Unintended or undesirable consequences would be managed by means of monitoring user capacity issues throughout the park and adapting to new or different impacts that may occur in the future. Increased staffing levels would provide personnel to manage the park and provide the desired future conditions and visitor experience within the parameters of the legal mandates.
4. *Preserving important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintaining, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice.* All alternatives preserve important resources in the park, provide for continued protection of cultural and natural resources and continue to manage 14,091 acres of wilderness for future generations. Alternative C best meets this criterion because it also provides increased opportunities for access, thereby increasing the variety of choice to visit certain areas of the park that were previously more difficult to reach such as the Hensley Settlement; provides opportunities for those with horses to camp in the park; increases opportunity for those who choose to overnight in a recreational vehicle; and provides additional opportunities to explore caves and other natural resources. With increased staffing levels, increased formalized partnering efforts, and increased educational programs, visitors would be provided more opportunities to participate in more activities, or may choose experiences of solitude in the wilderness. Alternative C provides the most opportunity for individual choice, while preserving resources.
5. *Achieving a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities.* Alternative C would provide the best satisfaction of a "balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities." Alternative C contains the largest acreage of Developed Zone compared to other alternatives and has the highest potential for attracting visitors to the park. More visitors to the park could result in more business for commercial enterprises at the park and in neighboring areas, as well as the potential for new concessions or other commercial operations in the park. Increased communication and

partnering under Alternative C would improve educational opportunities to promote the benefits of sustainable practices, resource protection and increase park stewardship.

6. *Enhancing the quality of renewable resources and approaching the maximum attainable recycling of non-renewable resources (National Environmental Policy Act, 1969).* Alternative A would best meet this criterion because it would feature the least amount of construction of new facilities that could affect renewable resources such as drinking and groundwater supplies, surface water quality and natural vegetation. Alternative B and C would maintain existing conditions or result in localized reductions in the quality of renewable resources through construction and subsequent alteration or loss of habitat. Where new facilities would be constructed, sustainable design principles and practices would be used where applicable, thereby maximizing recycling of materials. None of the alternatives proposes a long-term change in the use of depletable resources.

PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The public was provided different avenues to participate during development of the plan, including: participation in public meetings, responses to newsletters, and submitting comments on the park's website by e-mail or letter. Input from the interested public, organizations, and local, state, and federal agencies was gathered throughout the planning process. At the beginning of the process, both internal and external input was obtained as part of the scoping process. Input gathered during scoping was used to develop the alternatives and assess and compare the effects of management alternatives.

The notice of intent to prepare an EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on May 29, 2003. During scoping for this GMP / EIS, NPS staff provided an overview of the project, including purpose and need and preliminary issues. The public was asked to submit comments, concerns, and suggestions relating to the project and preliminary issues.

Internal scoping consisted of initial identification of issues by NPS staff based on what they had encountered with respect to managing park resources and experiences with visitors who have come to enjoy the park. NPS meetings were held at the park during the week of September 22, 2003, to obtain the park's initial input into the process.

The external scoping process provided early identification of concerns, issues, expectations, and values of existing and potential visitors, neighbors, cooperating associations, partners, scientists, scholars, and other government agencies. Public scoping meetings were advertised during May and June of 2004. A newsletter describing the General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement process was prepared and distributed in June 2004 that also announced the public meeting schedule. A scoping letter was mailed to local, state, and federal agency representatives, tribal representatives and the public in August 2004. The scoping letter contained information on the function of a general management plan, statements of the park purpose and significance, information on the planning team and the process for planning, and methods available to the public for communicating with the team and participating in the planning effort.

The public was invited to voice issues and suggest ideas for the future of the park at three public scoping meetings held on August 10, 11, and 12, 2004, at the park and nearby venues. Press releases were issued prior to the public meetings, and comment cards and Internet addresses were provided for public use. Also, meetings were held with stakeholders during August and September 2004. These stakeholders included representatives from federal, state and local agencies, local governments, and educational institutions in the region, environmental interest groups, recreation user groups, historical societies and tourism groups. Information regarding the general management planning process was provided at the visitor center and park staff provided information to visitors regarding how to comment as well. The public scoping comment period was

open for 30 days, and 12 meetings were held with the interested public and stakeholders to obtain public comment. Over 500 comments were received during scoping. More than 30 percent of the comments related to education, outreach, and partnering, and nearly 25 percent of the comments were related to access issues. Trails and economic issues each encompassed approximately 10 percent of the comments. Fern Lake, special events, and other issues comprised the remaining comment topics.

A second newsletter was prepared and distributed in October 2005 that described how the management alternatives were developed based on agency and public input, and announced public meetings that were held in November, 2005. The alternatives were presented to the interested public during four meetings held at the park on November 29 and 30, 2005. Press releases were issued prior to the public meetings, comment forms were provided and the public was notified how to comment via the Internet. Many of the public's comments at the meetings were directed at the potential use of Fern Lake and access to Hensley Settlement.

A third newsletter was issued in May 2009 that provided an update on the plan and described the alternatives that would be presented in the Draft GMP / EIS. The newsletter also identified that the next step in the process was issuance of the draft plan, and that public meetings for the draft plan would be announced.

A fourth newsletter was issued in November 2009 to announce the release of the Draft GMP / EIS and identify the date and location of public meetings. This newsletter notified the public how to comment via mail, Internet or in person. All newsletters are available online, as are other documents related to this planning effort.

The final three public meetings were held on December 8 and 9, 2009 at the visitor center. At each meeting, the superintendent, Mark Woods, and David Libman, from the Southeast Regional Office, gave brief summaries of the history and status of the GMP, followed by a question and answer period. The remaining time was spent in an open house in which planning team members discussed the project with meeting attendees using posters that summarized the features of each alternative. Comment sheets were made available, some comments were collected at the meeting, and additional comments were requested during a 60 day comment period.

Agency and American Indian Consultation and Coordination

In addition to the consultation described above, additional consultation with agencies was conducted prior to completing the 2009 Draft GMP / EIS.

In accordance with 36 CFR 800 and the Programmatic Agreement between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and the NPS, a letter was sent to the Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky State Historic Preservation Officers and to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to initiate consultation. The letters invited them to participate in the planning process and informed them that the NPS plans to use the EIS to fulfill the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act as well as comply with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act.

The NPS consulted with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Offices under the terms of the Nationwide Programmatic Agreement for Section 106 compliance. Based on this consultation, the NPS determined what actions are programmatic exclusions, and for all other undertakings what actions would be required for review and comment under 36 Code of Federal Regulations 800. Letters were received from the three State Historic Preservation Offices and copies are included after the comments and response section.

During preparation of the Final GMP, and in response to comments, the NPS also conducted additional coordination with the Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer. Because specific future project designs are not yet available, a final conclusion regarding effects cannot be made, and a more conservative approach was taken in the GMP for describing effects on Section 106 resources; therefore, there would be a potential for adverse effects on cultural resources. When specific projects are proposed that have a potential to affect cultural resources, they will undergo a full compliance review, to include Section 106 and National Environmental Policy Act assessments. These assessments will be tiered to information in the GMP / EIS. A similar response was provided to the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Officer.

In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.), the NPS contacted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by letter to initiate consultation and to provide a list of threatened and endangered species, critical habitats, and species of concern. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reviewed the Draft document and indicated that their primary concern was the continued protection and conservation of listed species, specifically Blackside Dace and Indiana Bat, and had no further substantive comments. The three state natural resources agencies were also contacted to provide a list of threatened and endangered species. Consultation letters were also sent to the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4.

Letters were sent in October 2004 to Federally-recognized American Indian Tribes with ancestral lands in Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky requesting feedback concerning the GMP. These letters were followed up with individual phone calls and a subsequent letter identifying the purpose and need of the project and requesting input.

CONCLUSION

As described in the "Mitigation" section, all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative have been adopted. Because there would be no major adverse impacts to resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes in the establishing legislation or proclamation for CUGA; (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or (3) identified as a goal in relevant DOI planning documents, there would be no impairment of the park's resources or values. After a review of these effects, the alternative selected for implementation will not impair park resources or values and will not violate the NPS Organic Act.